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CUBAN INDEPENDENCE.

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SPEECH

OF

HON. JOHN L. WILSON,

OF WASHINGTON,

IN THE

SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES,

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SATURDAY, APRIL 16, 1893.

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Mr. W. A. Smith

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SPEECH  
OF  
HON. JOHN L. WILSON.

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The Senate having under consideration the joint resolution (S. R. 149) for the recognition of the independence of the people of Cuba, demanding that the Government of Spain relinquish its authority and government in the Island of Cuba, and to withdraw its land and naval forces from Cuba and Cuban waters, and directing the President of the United States to use the land and naval forces of the United States to carry these resolutions into effect—

Mr. WILSON said:

Mr. PRESIDENT: I had hoped that the resolutions of the Committee on Foreign Relations might be adopted by the Senate without debate. It was my earnest desire again to witness that magnificent spectacle of the representatives of the people, without regard to party, voting to maintain the national honor with the same calm dignity with which they voted fifty millions for the national defense.

Mr. President, the results of that act were worth all the cost. It said to all the world that the American people were united. It said that all sectionalism had been abolished. It said, "No North, no South, no East, no West, but one country, one flag, one people."

I had hoped for immediate action. I had hoped to see the Senate and House hold up the hands of the President, "even until the going down of the sun and until Amalek and his people should have been discomfited with the edge of the sword."

Mr. President, I regret, as this debate has progressed, that an apparent effort should have been made to obtain some partisan advantage from such a serious issue as that of war. "Our country first and party afterwards" is the motto that should guide all true patriots. In the last one hundred years no war has been declared

or remained from without criticism, usually unjust, upon those who have had the responsibility of waging it.

In 1870 France, with the cry "On to Berlin!" and without preparation, rushed headlong into war; and Alsace and Lorraine stand as monuments to her folly. But yesterday Greece clamored for war, and her Government was forced into it without adequate preparation and with an army and navy that had nothing to fight with but the remembrance of the glories of Salamis, Marathon, and Lepanto; and it took the combined force of Europe to maintain her integrity as a nation. Mr. President, what we needed was adequate preparation; less oratory and more powder; less rhetoric and more rams.

I am not versed in—nor do I care for—academic discussions of so-called international law. Divesting it of all subtleties and applying the principles of a sound common sense to this question, it must be acknowledged that the United States has grave ground of complaint against Spain. It is not that Spain has maintained a nuisance at our doors; it is not that we have been forced at an enormous expense to maintain our neutrality; it is not the fact of her centuries of misrule in Cuba, culminating in a barbarous and cruel war. It is all of these together that make the situation intolerable.

When the *Maine* went down in the harbor of Havana, she carried with her the last hope of Spanish sovereignty on the Western Hemisphere, and the silent and sunken wreck in that harbor is the harbinger of liberty and independence to the insurgents of Cuba.

Mr. President, I have heard much in this debate of the cost of war, and that this, though a powerful, was a peace-loving nation. No one has greater admiration for the marvelous development and growth of the American people than I. No one has greater admiration for their business acumen, activity, and enterprise, and no one more highly values their importance. The point is often made here and elsewhere that we must not disturb business, must not interfere with trade. There is more to deal with in the life of a nation than business or trade. There is patriotism, love of country, honor, and virtue—things that money can not make and money can not buy. What is it, as we go forth from this Cham-

ber and see the flag floating above us, that causes our hearts to beat stronger? Is it because we have become rich and powerful under its folds? I think not. When I see it there, I see no dollar marks on its broad stripes. I do not see the motto of the epicure—“Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die.” When I look I see, if anything, the picture of Washington, marching from defeat at Long Island to victory at Trenton, going from misery and starvation at Valley Forge to glorious triumph at Yorktown. I see the triumphs of John Paul Jones, of Perry, and Decatur. I see the grave and patient face of Lincoln, surrounded by all that mighty host that went forth to battle for constitutional liberty and that men might be free.

Mr. President, it is respect and honor for our flag and the principles it stands for that has made this country one of the great nations of the earth.

The Constitution of the United States imposes upon Congress the right to declare war. And while I would not shift upon any man, no matter how high his station, the responsibilities in which I should share, speaking for myself alone, if I could have my way, I would lay aside all other resolutions and cast my vote for a direct declaration of war. And I would follow that declaration with a vote to give to the President of the United States the money to make it effective, that we might wipe out the foul insult to our flag in the harbor of Havana.

Since the night of that unfortunate tragedy, if Spain had denounced the act and hunted down the assassins, meting out to them punishment for their crime, some avenue might have been left open to maintain an honorable peace. But in place of investigation we have had a shameful and self-convicting farce. In the place of honorable amend, we are now brought face to face with a foul slander upon the dead and living heroes, and the Spanish prime minister, in his official capacity, posts the officers and men of the *Maine*, both living and dead, as cowards, poltroons, and tricksters. In the name of the American Navy and in the name of her heroes of the past and of to-day, I denounce the foul slander.

Mr. President, Spain reached the height of her glory during a past age. Unwise and wasteful in her day of power and prosper-

ity, when her splendor dazzled the world, she stands to-day, without art, without literature, without science, and without hope, a bankrupt and ruined nation. There can be no glory in war over such a carcass. But we shall have war; not a war of conquest nor aggression, not war for territorial aggrandizement, but war on behalf of liberty and humanity.

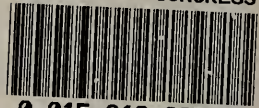
Mr. President, the issue that confronts us is momentous. But I do not doubt but that the representatives of the people will meet it with calmness and dignity, and work out its solution with a high sense of justice and honor, and when history shall speak of that nation which is greatest among the nations of the earth, she will say:

Each of the nations around you has fought for her country and line,  
 But thou hast fought for a stranger, in hate of a wrong not thine.  
 Happy are all free peoples, too strong to be dispossessed;  
 But blessed is she among nations who dared to be strong for the rest.





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